



Advocates for people with intellectual disabilities
and related developmental disabilities

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Testimony before the Judiciary Committee:

**S.B. #918 (Raised), "An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons
Whose Ability to Communicate Lack of Consent is substantially
Impaired"**

**H.B. #6314 (Raised), "An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons
Placed or Treated Under the Direction of the Commission of
Developmental Services"**

By

Lynn C. Warner, Executive Director/The Arc of Connecticut

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and Members of the Judiciary
Committee:

I am Lynn Warner, Executive Director of The Arc of Connecticut, a 59 year-old statewide advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. We have 23 local chapters that provide supports, services, and advocacy for individuals of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout Connecticut.

I am here today to testify in strong support of both **S.B. 918, "An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Whose Ability to Communicate Lack of Consent is substantially Impaired"** and **H.B. 6314, "An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Placed or Treated Under the Direction of the Commission of Developmental Services"**, as both of these raised bills will go a long way in protecting some of the most vulnerable people who receive services and supports from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) in Connecticut.

Among adults with intellectual disabilities, it is estimated that 83% of the females and 32% of males are the victims of sexual assault. (Johnson, L., Sigler, R. 2000. "Forced Sexual Intercourse Among Intimates," Journal of Interpersonal Violence.)

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Women who live in institutional settings and women who have multiple or significant disabilities, including the inability to communicate or speak in a manner that is considered typical or normal, are considered to be the most vulnerable to abuse because they are more dependent upon even larger numbers of people for their personal care. (Dick Sobsey, "Sexual Offenses and Disabled Victims: Research and Practical Implications", Vis-A-Vis, 1988). For example, women with disabilities often have to rely on others to help them with mobility, toileting, eating, bathing or other daily tasks. This dependence requires rather intimate relationships with a wide range of other people, including caregivers, health professionals, transportation providers and other family members. Dependence on a large network of relationships increases the chances that a woman with disabilities will experience abuse, they also have less of an ability to get away. (Health Canada, 2005).

While a disability can make it more difficult for a woman to escape or report abuse, the way society perceives persons with disabilities is probably a much more significant factor in her increased vulnerability to violence. In many ways these women tend to be viewed and treated as children and as lacking enough intelligence to know what has actually happened to their own bodies.

Just as any human being, a person with disabilities who cannot traditionally communicate has the right to decide who does and who does not have permission to put their hands on his or her body -- whether they are supported by DDS or not. Both S.B. 918 and H.B. 6314 will reinforce this right, strengthen protections, and increase the likelihood of a criminal conviction for people who victimize vulnerable individuals.

I strongly urge this committee to vote favorable on both raised bills. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.